

The local government system in

The Gambia



Key facts

POPULATION (Census 2003): 134,507
AREA: 11,295 sq km
CAPITAL: Banjul
LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONTRIBUTION TO GDP: 0.8%
CURRENCY: dalasi (GMD)
HEAD OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT: President Yahya Jammeh
FORM OF GOVERNMENT: republic
PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM: unicameral
STATE STRUCTURE: unitary
LANGUAGES: English (official) Gambian (recognised)
NATIONAL ELECTIONS: presidential: 2006;
national: 2007 **turnout:** - **next:** 2011
LOCAL ELECTIONS: last: 2008; **turnout:** -
next: 2012

SUMMARY

The Gambia is a republic with both central and local government. Local government is enshrined within Chapter XV of the constitution and is governed by the Local Government Act 2002. The Ministry of Local Government and Lands oversees local government affairs. There are three tiers of local government: eight councils, 144 ward development committees and 1,500 village development committees. Local government is responsible for setting and collecting taxes and rates and there is very little revenue-sharing or transfer from central to local government despite the devolution of core services such as health, education and roads. The Local Government Act 2002 makes provision to ensure the representation of women on councils, young people and representatives of civil society and community-based organisations.

1. CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

The Gambia is a republic with a president who serves as both head of state and head of government. The president is directly elected for a five-year term of office and is responsible for appointing the cabinet. The House of Assembly comprises 48 members elected by the first-past-

the-post system and a further five members appointed by the president, their term of office is also five years. The Gambia has eight sub-divisions, namely Banjul City, Kanifing Municipality, Western Division, Georgetown, Lower River Division, Upper River Division, North Bank Division and Central River Division. Local government is divided into districts and local councils.

2. LEGAL BASIS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

2.1 Constitutional provisions:

Chapter XV, Section 193 of the constitution, on local government and traditional rulers states that: "Local government administration in The Gambia shall be based on a system of democratically elected councils with a high degree of local autonomy."⁵

2.2 Main legislative texts:

The principal legislation governing local government is the Local Government Act 2002.

3. STRUCTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

3.1 Local government within the state:

There are five regions and the capital region, and eight local government areas, within which there is

one city and one municipality. The five regions are headed by regional governors appointed by the president and the city and municipality are headed by mayors elected by universal adult suffrage.

3.2 Ministerial oversight:

The Ministry of Local Government and Lands oversees local government affairs on behalf of the central government and also advises the cabinet on local government matters. The Directorate of Governance in the ministry advises the minister through the permanent secretary, and is entrusted with coordinating the formation and implementation of the decentralisation process.

3.3 Council types:

There are three tiers of local government: eight area councils, 144 ward development committees (WDC) and 1,500 village development committees (VDC). Each level has a committee responsible for decision-making, coordination and implementation of specific functions.

3.3.1 Area councils:

Area councils are the highest tier of local government covering a large area of land with

Table 1. Distribution of councils and population

Region (formerly Division)	No. of districts	Area Council	Ward. dev. com.	Village development committee	Population (Census)
Banjul		Banjul City	n/a	n/a	34,828
Kanifing		Kanifing Municipality	n/a	n/a	322,410
Western	9	Brikama Area	n/a	n/a	392,987
Lower River	6	Mansakonko Area	n/a	n/a	72,546
Northern Bank	6	Kerewan Area	n/a	n/a	172,806
		Kuntaur Area	n/a	n/a	79,098
		Janjangbureh Area [Georgetown]	n/a	n/a	106,799
Upper River	4	Basse Area	n/a	n/a	183,033
	37	TOTAL 8	144	1,500	1,364,507

numerous ward development committees within its jurisdiction. The members are made up of the ward chairpersons. The council directs the area development plan and reviews all ward plans before passing them on to the Department of Planning and Development for approval and budget support.

3.3.2 Ward development committees direct the preparation of ward plans, in consultation with ward stakeholders and assistance from Multi-disciplinary Facilitation Teams (MDFTs) for transmission to the area council for support and or approval.

3.3.3. Village development committees comprise representatives elected by universal suffrage, along with a directly elected chairperson who also acts a representative on the ward and area councils. The VDC directs the preparation of the village plan in consultation with village stakeholders and with the technical assistance of MDFTs. The plans are approved by the ward development committee which also coordinates their implementation.

4. ELECTIONS

4.1 Recent local elections:

The most recent local elections were held in January 2008 for councillors and mayors in the eight area councils, the next are scheduled for 2012.

4.2 Voting system:

Local government elections are held every four years, with the provision that there shall be at least 12 months between any local government election and elections to the house of assembly.

4.3 Elected representatives:

Nominees for councillors must be citizens of The Gambia, over the age of 21 and have been a resident of the local government authority in which they are standing for a minimum of 12 months. They also must be able to speak English

proficiently and cannot at any one time be a member of more than one council. The Local Government Act 2002 makes provision for a seyfo (chief) representative on the council; or, in the case of a municipality, an alkalo (village headperson). These representatives must be selected by all the district seyfolu or all the alkalolu in the municipality.

4.4 Women's representation:

Whenever more than two-thirds of the elected council members are male, a woman must be nominated to represent women's groups in the area.

4.5 Other nominated representatives:

The Local Government Act 2002 makes provision for representation of young people within each area, and further members representing local, commercial and social interest groups to also be nominated providing that their number should total no more than one-fifth of the elected members of a council. These nominated members are proposed by the civil society organisation or groups they represent, and are appointed by the chairperson with the approval of the secretary of state.

5. SYSTEMS FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

5.1 Legal requirement:

Chapter XV of the constitution makes provision for the 'functions, powers and duties of local government authority including the participation of the inhabitants in the development and administration of the area', however, the Local Government Act 2002 makes no mention of community participation in local decision making.

5.2 Implementation:

The government has set up a number of mechanisms at council level to promote participatory decision-making, such as the inclusion of representatives from different development stakeholders including civil

society/community-based organisations on WDCs and VDCs, the creation of technical advisory committees (TACs) at council and regional level, and MDFTs from line ministries. There is also a Department of Community Development which promotes development at the community level through a participatory planning approach.

5.3 E-government:

There is no e-government strategy in place.

6. ORGANISED LOCAL GOVERNMENT

6.1 National Local Government Association:

The Gambia Association of Local Government Authorities (GALGA) is a voluntary membership organisation. GALGA's functions are: to promote the development of local government administration; to protect the interests of all member local authorities; to provide a forum for discussion and exchange of ideas and experience relating to local government administration and service delivery with a view to solving problems; to support local authorities in implementation of their policies; and to provide a channel of communication between central and local government.

7. INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

The relations between central and local government are regulated by the Local Government Act 2002, which provides for structures such as committees and advisory boards, and established positions such as secretary of state, permanent secretary, director, chief executive etc. GALGA is a key body in the promotion of intergovernmental relations.

8. MONITORING SYSTEMS

The Ministry of Local Government and Lands is empowered to monitor and coordinate local government authorities. The local government authorities have recruited directors of development planning in each area council and the purpose of the MDFTs and the TACs is to

Table 2. Aggregate revenue and expenditure for local government 2003/4

Revenue in Gambian dalasi (000s)		Expenditure in Gambian dalasi (000s)	
Government transfer	negligible	General administration	12,233
Tax	3,546	Development projects	26,690
Rates	48,465	Essential services	27,802
Rents and fees	39,008	Markets	5,560
Licensing	16,549	Civil education	5,560
		Health and social welfare	3,336
		Education	3,336
		Cleansing services	3,336
Miscellaneous/other	10,639	Miscellaneous/other	23,353
TOTAL	118,207	TOTAL	111,207

provide advice to local institutions at council level with the responsibility of monitoring projects. Each TAC provides technical advice not only to the council but also to the WDCs and VDCs within its local government area, in order to ensure that local projects conform to national standards, policies and priorities. TACs are chaired by either the regional governor or the mayor.

9. FINANCE, STAFFING AND RESOURCES

9.1 Locally raised revenue:

Local government is responsible for setting and collecting taxes and rates. Ministerial supervision is exercised over the setting of local taxes and local authorities are not permitted to set deficit budgets.

9.2 Transfers:

Despite the legal framework for decentralisation stipulating that there should be a concomitant transfer of resources from central government to local government, there is no general policy of revenue-sharing and the specific grants are very small, making only 0.1% contribution to local government revenue overall.

9.3 Local authority staff:

Staff are recruited by the individual local authority and they retain the power to discipline and dismiss. Central government also deploys staff to the councils from time to time.

No officers are required by law. The head of the paid service is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The typical staffing structure has at its apex the CEO. The second-tier staff positions are directors of finance, administration, services, and planning development. Third-tier staff are the section heads to whom the general staff work.

health, agriculture, feeder roads, forest management, water supply, sewage and public sanitation and other basic services.

References and useful websites

1. The Gambia Central Statistics Department www.gambia.gov.gm/Statistics/AboutCSD.htm
Census 2003, population by district www.gambia.gov.gm/Statistics/Statistics.htm
2. UN statistics <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/pr/oducts/dyb/dyb2008/Table03.pdf>
3. IMF statistics www.imf.org/external/data.htm
4. Ministry of Local Government and Lands www.molgl.gov.gm
5. Constitution of the republic of The Gambia, www.ncce.gm/files/constitution.pdf
6. Local Government Act 2002 www.iec.gm/files/images/Local_Governmen_t_Act.pdf
7. Government of The Gambia website www.statehouse.gm/
8. UNDP Human Development Report 2010 www.hdr.undp.org
9. Map of The Gambia www.gambia.gov.gm/Statistics/images/THGAMBIA.gif

10. DISTRIBUTION OF SERVICE DELIVERY RESPONSIBILITY

The policy and legal framework for decentralisation stipulates that local councils shall be responsible for the provision of education,